The Rez Sisters Worksheet

1. Reflect on the importance of the character (spirit?) not seen by all the characters but seen by only one or a few of the characters and discuss that character’s importance to the dramatic action and the development of the plot.

Nanabush is noticeably a Trickster- the archetype that falls into the category of characters who do not follow conventional rules, and are often some form of spirit. Nanabush is a mysterious character who has no lines of his own but appears in nearly every scene, sort of in the background, observing the events that unfold. Most characters never see him, leading the audience to believe that he may not actually exist, or that the characters that do see him have an altered concept of reality. The fact that Zhaboonigan sees him instantly gives the suggestion that he can only be seen my mentally disabled, mentally warped, or mentally children. This mysterious character is there to remind the audience that throughout all the almost-modern bustle, these people are still tribal and have a rich history of their own, setting them apart from other Americans. The thing about Nanabush that most caught my eye is the way he appears just before a character reveals a deep truth about their own psyche and character. One such example is when he appears directly to Zhaboonigan and she begins to speak to him, and the two are in a slightly altered reality where no other character is aware of what is transpiring. She tells him of her childhood trauma, of when she was raped. She is not even aware that she was raped. Similar things occur around Nanabush, where he appears just before a confession. He seems to be a catalyst for a message.

2. Compare the aspirations and socio-economic level of the characters in this play with those in Wedding Band, Queen's Garden, and Real Women.

In Wedding Band, Queen’s Garden, and Real Women Have Curves, each story revolves around women of lower socio-economic status and race. In Wedding Band, the women want fairly tame goals- they all wish to be more comfortable economically and to pursue their romantic endeavors. In Queen’s Garden, Brenda strives to escape her life for one in a new place with better conditions. Real Women sees Ana also seek a better life, but specifically through college and educating other women, with the more ambitious goal of gender equality. The Rez Sisters also sees women seeking some level of gender equality and greater economic status. The four plays are very similar in background information, as they all occupy a similar level of oppression and poverty and revolve around women.

3. Compare the role of women and the depiction of men in this play with that in Real Women Have Curves

In both of the plays, women are the driving force behind the story and the only ones whose opinions the audience actually gets to hear. In Real Women Have Curves, the closest the audience gets to an encounter with a man is the discussion of El Tormentor. Even then, he is not actually a cast character with lines and an appearance on stage. We simply learn of him as a person through the women on stage and only have a secondhand knowledge. Men are depicted as nasty creatures that will use a woman for sex and only prey upon women because of their fertility and inherent sexiness. If a woman is physically unattractive, it seems that she will be overlooked by men, even if she has a beautiful mind. In addition, men seem to have impossible standards for women, but that is partially only because the women have impossible standards for themselves, as seen by the scene in which the women all take off their clothes and finally have a body positive moment.

In The Rez Sisters, men are once again in the background and there are few men with lines and appearances on the stage. Even the highly masculine Chief does not have a voice; he is simply a few instruments making noise for a few beats, while the audience must piece together the conversation from the reactions of the women. The only man who has an actor is the Bingo Master, and his character is so insignificant that the Nanabush actor plays him. The audience must interpret the women’s talk about men to discern the relationships with women. The main man who is talked about is Big Joey, who seems to be a hypermasculine figure, but is only mentioned when he sleeps with a woman. This shows how divided the lives of men and women are in this time period, and how each does not truly view the other as relevant to their own lives. Men are not seen in a favorable light in this play, as Zhaboonigan has had a traumatic experience where she was raped. Men truly play very little role in this play, but they exert influence on the women that the story follows.